Marxism, Anarchism and the Roots of the New Totalitarianism

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domination is taking and aim our struggle against them. To fail to do so is to remain the perpetual victims of the future.

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Anarchists who oppose the state and ignore technology have no means to counter Marxists; they result in being merely another variation of leftism. A recent article in Open Road, for example, "Video Death," lists the many physical horrors caused by video display technology and cathode ray tubes (cancer from low-level radiation, cataracts and fetus damage, to name a few), only to conclude, "But the fight is not against the technology. The fight is to make the machines work for us, not for our employers. VDT's (video display terminals) have the potential to make clerical jobs more interesting and less repetitive... The Solution to the problems currently presented by the VDTs clearly lies in worker control." ("Video Death," Rachel Sherban, Open Road, Spring-Summer 1981).

This argument which assumes some safe level of radiation, is not only merely a step away from the Maoist defense of "socialist fallout," it also takes for granted a society based upon technology, and not only technology, but a society which will still have a need for office work! Even if the destructive physical effects of the cathode ray tube could be eliminated, it is the nature of technology as a set of social acts, and not just the isolated product, which makes freedom impossible.

Bakunin foresaw the kind of society that the Marxists struggle to achieve, writing, "When all other classes have exhausted themselves, the State then becomes the patrimony of the bureaucratic class and then falls–or if you will, rises–to the position of a machine." The anarchist and libertarian communists who fixate on the political apparatus and fail to see the roots of this new totalitarianism in the modern massified technological and bureaucratic system, are merely promoting a flabby brand of Marxism, and will contribute to the edification of the new state–technological despotism, just as surely as will the Marxists who openly proclaim it.

It is not enough to oppose the forms of oppression which characterize the past–capital is already rendering them obsolete. The great challenge that we face is to discern the new forms which

ticularly the complex, expertise-dominated computer technology so dear to the UCC) is inherently a bureaucratic system that must separate itself from society as a whole in order to manipulate the infinite amount of information constantly fed into it, with which it–or perhaps the machine itself, in which case it will only carry out the machine's directives–will make planning decisions.

High Tech Incompatible With Freedom

Athanasiou mystifies technology in the same way that Trotskyists mystify social relations in the Soviet Union, isolating certain idealized perspectives of it from its historical reality. His defense of technology can only exist, as Camatte has described Marxism, as a polemic with reality. The technocrats-out-of-power of the UCC are fascinated with high technology; one can only suspect that they aspire to become its technical commissars. Their assurance that their vision of technology is compatible with freedom are as convincing as similar claims of Marxists who believe that state power can be made to serve humanity. But the truth is, as Eugene Schwartz wrote in his book Overskill, "Cybernetics is for automata, and the planned society is the prelude to the universal concentration camp."

The notion that the state can be demolished while the technological apparatus of capital remains intact is founded on the fallacy perpetrated by Marx and disseminated by his disciples that "In themselves these means of production are as little capital as gold and silver are in themselves money." Naturally capital is more than just technology, but it is also the technology and the human relations it creates. No such apparatus could appear out of nothing; it presupposes relations of hierarchy and domination irrespective of the formal and juridical property forms. Capital can do without the bourgeoisie, as the USSR has demonstrated quite effectively. But it cannot exist without technology.

"Subjection of nature's forces to man, machinery, application of chemistry to industry and agriculture, steam navigation, railways, electric telegraphs, clearing of whole continents for cultivation, canalization of rivers, whole populations conjured out of the ground–what earlier century had even a presentiment that such productive forces slumbered in the lap of social labor?"

–Marx and Engels, The Communist Manifesto

"Here as everywhere else, we must distinguish between the increased productiveness due to the development of the social process of production, and that due to the capitalist exploitation of that process."

–Marx, Capital

"For us communists, builders of the most advanced society in the history of mankind, scientific-technological progress is one of the main ways of speeding up the plans of the party regarding the transformation of nature."

–Leonid Brezhnev, 1968

As Jacques Camatte wrote in *The Wandering of Humanity*, Marx's work "seems largely to be the authentic consciousness of the capitalistic mode of production." Indeed, Marx's thought matured during the apogee of the vogue of nineteenth century scientific positivism, and reflected that religion of industrial progress both in its exaltation of scientific rationalism and its notion of material progress based on mechanization and industry. Like other positivist schemata of its time, "scientific socialism" operated by way of a deterministic materialism which saw human nature as productivist and which reduced all cultural creation to a mere reflection

of "material practice," seeing humanity's relation to the world in almost crude, naturalistic images as a struggle to conquer nature. The complex mythical structures of ancient communities were seen as infantile attempts to realize and intervene in natural processes, which could ultimately be superseded by scientific instrumental rationality.

Like other aspects of scientistic ideology which grew out of that ever-so-bourgeois of centuries, Marx's vision delineated human experience into neat, philosophical "stages of development," each bounded and characterized by its particular "mode of production," and all leading irrevocably toward the universalization which capital would create, and finally, to its "dialectical negation"–socialism. As Marx put it himself, De te fabula narratur–that is, the "advanced" societies represented the destiny, with minor divergences, of the "barbarian, pre-capitalist" societies. Progress demanded that the ancient communities be uprooted and the old ways of life destroyed; the imperative of the developing "mode of production" burst the fetters of the old societies, but this time motion would undermine the bourgeoisie, "the first to show what man's activity can bring about," and usher in the socialist paradise.

This bloody, painful process is "material progress" to the historical materialists, and in the eyes of these bourgeois intellectuals, industrialization was an inevitable "stage" on the road to socialist destiny. The worker had first to lose his tools, the farmer his land, and become mere appendages of the machine in order to ultimately become its masters. Even the earliest class divisions could be justified by virtue of the fact that they destroyed the former "backward conditions of scarcity," and laid the foundations for progress. Progress would destroy the "infantile" myths and strip the world of its halos and its mystifications. It would urbanize the countryside, centralize production, and rescue people from the "idiocy of rural life."

Bay Area, "Processed World," Tom Athanasiou uses the completely Marxist argument that technological progress "will never be created by a system so paralyzed by its need for profit and centralized control" to back up his claims that "there is nothing inherently bad about computer technology," and that "the ease with which computers are used as instruments of social control cannot be allowed to obscure their liberatory potential."

Athanasiou and other people around the UCC have defended high technology in general and computers in particular, identifying the new information technologies as a precondition for a decentralized, autonomous society. But their formulations reveal them to be unconscious mouthpieces of the new technological totalitarianism. Liberatory intentions aside, they argue for a world in which the universal circulation of money and commodities is replaced by the universal circulation of information and commodities, in which the global corporate economy is transcended by a global network of cybernetic planning, a world still based upon factory production–in other words, a new development of capital. Athanasiou argues as a matter of course that the "vicious forces" of this society, the military, corporate and governmental structures will be "thoroughly dismantled." "From now on," he effuses, "people would work, study, create, travel and share their lives because they wanted to, for themselves and for others."

This last statement sounds uncannily similar to any number of Leninist descriptions of socialism after the mystical "withering away of the state." But the fact is that we cannot dismantle the corporate, military and statist structures without dismantling technology, without smashing the megamachine. East and West, the technical, scientific and political-corporate-military bureaucracies make up a unified and integrated system.

Massified technology, production and distribution remove the power of individuals and communities to determine their own destiny and places it in the hands of an apparatus. It is not a question of "evil men," but the totality of a system. Technology (and par-

equal to the functioning of the economic regime and in control of everything…" This is the socialist state that the Marxists clamor for, the "coherent state" to use Ellul's words, which attempts to coordinate the entire apparatus within one body.

Anarchists and libertarian communists have traditionally opposed authoritarian Marxism from the perspective of anti-authoritarianism and anti-statism. But the state is only one structural element–albeit an integral one–in a totality which is the bureaucratic-technological megamachine. Opposing the state while at the same time defending technology or remaining indifferent to it is comparable to opposing the police force while saying nothing about the military. They are part of a unitary whole.

The modern means of production are inherently centralized, authoritarian, bureaucratic and compartmentalized. Anarchists and syndicalists who argue that modern technology can be employed to "serve the interests of the workers" are deluding themselves, and are in actuality capitulating to the authoritarian Marxists. Engels is correct–the megamachine is a totality which can only function by way of domination. The megamachine, like the factory which is its bowels and microcosm, as Murray Bookchin has written, "is a school for hierarchy, for obedience and command, not for a liberatory revolution. It reproduces the servility of the proletariat and undermines its selfhood and its capacity to transcend need."

Global Network of Cybernetic Planning

A couple of examples among many from anarchists and various libertarian communists will suffice to demonstrate that many people do not understand the foundations of the modern forces of domination and hence, are incapable of opposing them. In a recent publication put out by a group of people loosely associated with the Union of Concerned Commies (UCC) in the San Francisco

Machines the Key to Liberation

It wasn't the new massified, industrial technology which was oppressive, only the manner in which the bourgeoisie used it for its own benefit at the expense of the great majority. The problem was that the new modern mode of production had not reached full maturity; when it did, the oppressive conditions of capitalism, according to Engels, would be "swept away by the full development of the modern productive forces."

In fact, it is the contention that bourgeois capitalism fettered the means of production and their free development that became the central criticism of capitalism by Marx and Engels and later by their epigones. After all, if the machines and the industrial system were fundamental to the oppression and dispossession of the human being, they were also destined to be the key to liberation.

"It took both time and experience," wrote Marx in Capital, "before the work people learned to distinguish between machinery and its employment by capital, and to direct their attacks, not against the material instruments of production, but against the mode in which they were used." The forces of production would be too much for bourgeois society; bourgeois property forms would become a fetter on their development and would be destroyed in a crisis of overproduction, in which the conditions of bourgeois society would show themselves to be "too narrow to comprise the wealth created by them."

Capitalism stands in the way of technological progress because it subordinates the latter to the imperative of profit. Communist politicians and communist regimes have argued that by doing away with private property forms, technical progress would become the goal of all social efforts. As Engels wrote in Anti-Duhring, when the forces of society were discerned and scientifically enumerated, they would be transformed "from demoniac masters into willing servants." "The capitalist mode of appropriation," he wrote in the same passage, "… will thereby be replaced by the mode of appro-

priation of the products based on the nature of modern means of production themselves..."

In other words, the impediments imposed upon technology by profits and private enterprise, the "anarchy in production," to use a favorite term of Marxists, would give way under the scientific socialist regime to technological automatism. Technical automatism tends to destroy private capitalist ventures, since they would have insufficient time to realize their investments, but a state socialist machine would be able to give free play to technology and science and follow them wherever they led into the future.

For the Marxist epigones, technology is the instrument of liberation for the proletariat. Lenin, for example, who defined socialism as workers' soviets plus electrification, saw little difference in the overall contours and goals of socialist and private capitalist societies, writing in 1917, "Socialism is merely state-capitalist monopoly which is made to serve the interests of the whole people."

Dzherman M. Gvaishiani, a recent deputy chairman of the USSR Committee for Science and Technology, agrees, claiming, "Even though the function of organizing combined labor emerged on the basis of capitalist production, it is conditioned not by the specific features of that system, but by the basic objective features of large-scale social production in general" (quoted in Technology and Communist Culture, edited by Frederic J. Fleron, Jr., Praeger Publishers, 1977). To Gvishiani, who is interested in the question of scientific management of the production process and the work force, Capitalism in the west has played an "historically progressive" role, contradictorily combining "refined exploitation of the working people with the latest achievements in the field of organization and management, which reflect the demands of large-scale machine production."

These methods cannot fully develop under capitalism; in contrast, the socialist system "removes all obstacles," and "creates the most favourable objective conditions" not only for the advance-

ment of science and technology in general, but specifically in the field of management: "Under socialism the social aspect of management does not oppose the organizational and technical aspects, but forms its basis and promotes its success," he writes. "Socialist production relations engender qualitatively new, consistently progressive management methods, corresponding to the requirements of accelerated economic development."

Gvishiani is not simply following the tradition of Lenin, who saw in Taylorism and time management (as he saw in all "advances" of capitalism) "the refined bestiality of bourgeois exploitation [combined] with a series of the most valuable achievements in... the development of the most accurate methods of work and in the introduction of the best systems of audibility and control, etc.", but also the tradition of Engels, who writes in his essay On Authority, that industrial technology by definition demands subordination to command, to the "despotism" of the automatic machinery "independent of all social organization," to "the necessity of authority, and of imperious authority at that..." "Wanting to abolish authority in large-scale industry," Engels argues, "is tantamount to wanting to abolish industry itself, to destroy the power loom in order to return to the spinning wheel."

State Is Only One Structural Element

Not only are authority and hierarchy central to the operation of the factory, but the factory system as a whole, and the concomitant systematization of labor and social differentiation, demand the maintenance and expansion of another instrument: that of the state. Jacques Ellul writes, "The individual is not by himself rational enough to accept what is necessary to the machines. He rebels too easily. He requires an agency to constrain him, and the state had to play this role–but the state now could not be the incoherent, powerless, and arbitrary state of tradition. It had to be an effective state,